Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Exotic Pest Eradication Program

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Exotic Pest Eradication in the state. The purpose of exotic pest eradication is to prevent new agricultural pests from becoming established in California.

The Food and Agriculture Code (FAC) requires the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to "establish, maintain, and enforce quarantine, eradication, and other regulations … necessary to circumscribe and exterminate or prevent the spread of any pest" if it is feasible. The goal of the proposed exotic pest eradication program is to eliminate target pests without significantly impacting the indigenous environment.

A description of the proposed program along with potential environmental consequences, is presented in the attached Project Data and Environmental Effects review.

The CDFA is the Lead Agency for eradication of exotic pests, and as such has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) pursuant to Section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The purpose of the NOP is to inform agencies and the general public that an EIR is being prepared for this program, and to invite comments on the scope and content of the planned EIR. To meet time limits established by state law, comments must be received no later than January 17, 2005

All comments are to be submitted to:

Mr. Jim Rains
California Department of Food and Agriculture
Plant Health Pest Prevention Services
1220 N Street, Rm. A-316
Sacramento, CA 95814

CDFA is scheduling public scoping meetings to give the public an opportunity to appear and comment on the scope, focus and content of the EIR if so desired. The meetings are to be held at the following locations:

Arcadia: January 6, 2005, 6-8 p.m.
Los Angeles County Agricultural Commissioner's Office
12300 Lower Azusa Road
Arcadia, Ca.

Salinas: January 12, 2005, 6-8 p.m.
Natividad Medical Center
1441 Constitution Blvd., Bldg. #200
Salinas, Ca.

Sacramento: January 14, 2005, 6-8 p.m.
Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioner's Office
4137 Branch Center Rd.
Sacramento, Ca.

This notice along with the Project Data and Environmental Effects Review are available on the CDFA web site at http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/epepeir. Comments may be submitted by sending them to the above address or via e-mail addressed to JRains@cdfa.ca.gov with "Exotic Pest Eradication EIR" on the subject line. All comments will receive equal consideration regardless of mode of submission.

I. PROJECT DATA

Project Title

Exotic Pest Eradication Program

Lead Agency Name and Address (and program sponsor)

Department of Food and Agriculture
State of California
1220 N Street, Room A-400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Other Public Agencies with Potential Jurisdiction

California Departments of:
- Pesticide Regulation
- Fish and Game
- Health Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Conservation

California Environmental Protection Agency
- Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
- State Water Resources Control Board

State Lands Commission
California County Agricultural Commissioners
U. S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
NOAA Fisheries

Project Location

The proposed program encompasses the entire state.

Background and History

California is under continuous threat of invasion by a wide range of exotic pests. Continued population growth results in increased trade and imports. Agricultural imports increased by 137% between 1985 and 2003. Introductions of invasive, exotic pests on nursery stock, fruits and vegetables, in packing materials and pallets, or on other types of shipped goods is also increasing. Historically, many exotic pests have come from Europe. More recently, increasing immigration from Asia and Australia has resulted in increased trade with these regions. Increased trade has resulted in an increasing number of damaging, exotic pests discovered in California from these areas including Asian gypsy moth, peach fruit fly, guava fruit fly, eucalyptus longhorned beetles, eucalyptus psyllids and scutellata fruit fly. A total of 30 new species of exotic insect pests from Asia and Australia were found breeding in California between 1980 and

2003 compared to 8 between 1955 and 1979. A number of exotic plant pests, including purple loosestrife, yellow star thistle and spotted knapweed, have also been introduced into the State.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA's) pest prevention program, coupled with timely eradication efforts, has kept California free of many pests that plague the rest of the US including gypsy moth, Japanese beetle, Colorado potato beetle and European corn borer. Introduced pests are the main source of injury to fruits, vegetables, ornamental plants, pets and livestock in California. Over two-thirds of all pesticides used on agricultural crops in California today are aimed at pests that originated from outside the state and have become established here.

Since 1975, CDFA has successfully carried out approximately 240 exotic pest eradication actions, both large and small, including Mediterranean fruit fly, Mexican fruit fly, oriental fruit fly, Caribbean fruit fly, peach fruit fly, guava fruit fly, melon fly, gypsy moth, and Japanese beetle. Other eradication projects have been initiated against apple maggot, white garden snail, red imported fire ant, and olive fruit fly, however, eradication was deemed less than feasible or incomplete after follow up evaluations and control programs or additional measures were initiated.

Glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS), a major vector of Pierce's disease and other plant diseases, was recognized in California after vineyards in southern California suffered a serious outbreak of Pierce's disease in August 1999. Since that time, efforts have focused on confining the infestation to southern California, where it is deemed to be generally established, while research is conducted to find more effective means to control GWSS, and at the same time look for a cure for Pierce's Disease itself, which is caused by the bacterium *Xyella fastidiosa*. A containment program is in effect that utilizes quarantine measures and spot eradication programs that are carried out whenever satellite infestations are discovered outside the area considered to be generally infested.

Immediate action is required as soon as an exotic pest population is discovered in order to prevent further expansion. Expansion could result in the need for more widespread operations at best, and if widespread enough, could render eradication infeasible. As a result, eradication actions, by necessity, are generally launched before an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) can be prepared. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) allows for emergencies. An emergency is often declared upon discovery of an exotic pest in order to facilitate an expeditious response.

In the past the CDFA has prepared an EIR, usually after the fact, once an eradication project becomes necessary. Eradication EIRs prepared in the past include Japanese beetle, white garden snail, gypsy moth, fruit flies (separate documents for different pesticide application methods), and glassy-winged sharpshooter. A major portion of these documents covers the biology of the individual pest, its habits, life stages, nature of the injury each pest causes and reasons for eradication, followed by a discussion of eradication alternatives, and ultimately an assessment of potential environmental impacts of treatment alternatives.

Legal Requirements

The Food and Agriculture Code (FAC) requires CDFA to protect the environment, and provides authority to "*establish, maintain, and enforce quarantine, eradication, and other regulations … necessary to circumscribe and exterminate or prevent the spread of any pest*" not established in the state. Section 403 states: "*The department shall prevent the introduction and spread of injurious insect or animal pests, plant diseases, and noxious weeds*." To facilitate this requirement, Section 5322 provides the Secretary of Agriculture with authority to establish, maintain, and enforce quarantine, eradication, and other regulations which, in his or her opinion, are necessary to circumscribe and exterminate or prevent the spread of any pest which is not generally distributed within the state if there is a probability of spread, and control or eradication is thought to be feasible.

Thus, the CDFA is obligated to take action against exotic pests to prevent them from becoming generally established in the state.

Program Goals

The goal of the proposed program, in compliance with the legislative mandate, is to protect the environment by preventing the introduction and spread of injurious pests. It is intended that the program provide a coordinated approach that includes prevention as well as timely response actions to minimize environmental disruptions. Elements of this coordinated program include:

Prevention
Detection, and
Eradication

Prevention

Quarantine regulations are in place that prohibit the importation of goods that have a reasonable likelihood of carrying pests. An inspection program is in place to ensure compliance with quarantine regulations. Border inspection stations are in place to screen traffic coming into California in an attempt to prevent the introduction of infested materials into the state. If an exotic pest is found within the state, internal quarantine regulations are adopted as necessary to confine the newly discovered pest and limit its spread so that eradication, if deemed necessary, may be achieved. In cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), inspections are made of goods arriving from foreign destinations at ports of entry.

Detection

Insect traps are distributed throughout the state to monitor for invading pest species. Manual inspections are conducted to look for exotic weed species, including purple loosestrife and alligator weed. Once an exotic pest is located, intensified trapping and/or surveys are conducted to determine the size of the pest population and boundaries of the infested area. Additional detection methods may be used to look for various life stages of a pest, such as insect eggs and larvae (worms or maggots) by cutting samples of fruit open to look for larvae.

Eradication
The initial step is to confine the pest and limit its spread. If feasible, eradication is undertaken. Administrative actions may include an immediate quarantine to prevent transport of the pest out of the area. Measures are then considered to eliminate the entire population. Methods available to eradicate a pest depend on the biology of the pest, the size and nature of the area involved, and availability of resources.

Description of the Proposed Eradication Program

Pests are biological. There is a limited number of methods that can be used to bring about their demise. Methods include physical, cultural, biological, chemical, or a combination of these.

Physical
Physical methods include mechanical destruction, such as physical removal, e.g., cutting down a tree, vacuuming organisms off of surfaces, burning, flooding (or draining), and putting up migration barriers.

Cultural
Cultural practices can keep down the size of pest populations, but do not result in eradication. Crop rotation, planting disease and pest resistant crops, timed harvesting and field plowing, clean culture (minimizing weeds, picking up fallen fruits, etc.) are all cultural practices that can reduce pest pressures.

Biological
Biological approaches include the introduction of natural enemies of a pest, mating disruption and the introduction of organisms that cause diseases, e.g., viral infections of a pest. Such introductions can be specific to a singular pest organism.

Chemical
Chemical agents can act directly on a target pest causing fatal disruptions, or they can serve as attractants to help trap pest organisms, or lure them to toxic agents. Other chemicals can act a barriers to discourage pests from feeding on plants or animals, or can act as sex attractants to either trap insects or disrupt mating.

The proposed program will use a defined process to determine which available method or methods are capable of eliminating an invading pest with the least disruption to the surrounding environment. The program will include appropriate consultations with known pest experts and responsible and trustee agencies. Chemical pesticide use is strictly regulated and controlled by the U.S. and California Environmental Protection agencies. The programmatic use of these chemicals is limited in scope, but can involve expanded application areas and applications to environmentally sensitive sites that may require alternative management strategies. The use of chemical pesticides remains a primary method in responding to exotic pest invasions.

Other

Besides field management of an exotic pest infestation, the proposed program includes public outreach, environmental monitoring, regulatory (quarantine) actions, and community relations, e.g., interaction with local legislative units and administrative agencies.

II. Environmental Effects to be Examined in the EIR

The purpose of an EIR is to examine a project or program for potentially significant environmental consequences and to identify measures that can reduce or avoid (mitigate) potential adverse impacts. There are aspects of the proposed program that do not involve physical change to the environment. The EIR will focus on aspects of the program with potential adverse environmental impacts. Environmental factors identified as important for the proposed Exotic Pest Eradication Program include the following:

Land Use Disturbances

Treatment activities involve access to infested properties and may cause temporary land use restrictions secondary to quarantine actions. The type of agriculture in an area may be altered as a result of pest eradication actions. (Failure to eradicate a given pest would also result in changes to land use options.) The EIR will examine such potentials and their significance.

Hazards

Hazards associated with the use of chemical pesticides, release of biological agents, and removal or change in fauna or flora will be examined as they relate to program activity. Short and long range risks of different management practices will be considered, as will potential health impacts.

Water Quality

Water resources are ubiquitous and omnipresent. The potential for adversely impacting water resources, both surface and groundwater will be evaluated, as well as measures to minimize potential adverse impacts.

Biological Resources

Actions taken to cause the demise of pest organisms may involve temporary disruption of local plant and animal communities. As such, non-target organisms may also be impacted. Protected species may be present in areas invaded by exotic pests. The proposed program will incorporate procedures to evaluate infested areas for the presence of protected species prior to any action taken. Appropriate consultations will be made with responsible and trustee agencies through procedures established in a Memorandum of Understanding with the appropriate agency. The potential to adversely impact other non-target organisms, and the potential impact any such disruptions could have on the total environment, both short and long term, will be considered. Measures that could minimize these potentials will be examined as they relate to proposed programmatic operations.

Other

Other potential adverse environmental impacts may arise as rudiments of the proposed program are examined and evaluated. One purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to encourage interested parties to submit recommendations to the lead agency for consideration in the EIR.

INFORMATIONAL NOTE: An EIR is a disclosure document that is intended to provide the public and decision makers with information on the spectrum of potential environmental impacts that proposed actions (projects) may have. CEQA does not require that proposed actions be free of all adverse impacts, only that impacts be considered (disclosed), and that mitigation measures and alternatives be identified that may lessen potentially significant adverse impacts, where feasible, without jeopardizing the potential for accomplishing the goals of the project. An EIR does not grant authority to proceed, nor does it impose restrictions*. Any proposed project remains liable to all legitimate laws and regulations that govern proposed actions, such as endangered species, water quality, building permits, building codes, use restrictions and licensing requirements. An adequate EIR should examine reasonable mitigation measures and alternatives for the proposed action so that the project can be undertaken with effects on the environment reduced or avoided, where feasible. This is the objective of seeking input for the preparation of this EIR. [*Failure to prepare an adequate EIR can prevent a project from proceeding.]